COMPETENCE NEEDS AMONG LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICE PROVIDERS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Information Communication Technology (ICT) has brought tremendous impact on library services delivery worldwide. However, the fear that a large number of Library and Information Service providers in Nigeria do not possess the abilities, technicality and competence needed to successfully integrate these technologies into their daily operations prevail. This study was conducted to investigate the competence needs among library and information service providers in Nigeria. It was set out to identify the knowledge of librarians on essential skills and knowledge required to enhance service delivery in the evolving information landscape. Utilizing a descriptive research design, the study targeted librarians and information professionals across various libraries in Nigeria. Total enumeration of 58 librarians and information professionals from different library types, including academic, public, and school libraries were involved in the study. Structured questionnaire was used to gather data from 38 respondents and fit for analysis. Of these respondents, 60.5% were male, 42.1% held a Master's degree and 34.2% had 6–10 years of work experience. There were significant gaps in competencies, particularly in emerging technologies and digital information management, indicating a pressing need for targeted training programs. Most critical advocacy competence needs were found to include the ability to articulate library needs to stakeholders, lobbying skills and the skills to network and build relationship. The study concluded that enhancing the competency of library and information service providers is crucial for improving service delivery and meeting the demands of users in a digital age. Conducting continuous professional developmental programs is recommended to ensure that library professionals are equipped to meet the challenges of modern information services.

Keywords: Competence; Communication Technology Skills; Advocacy Skills; Librarianship; Digital Literacy

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has significantly transformed the global information ecosystem, leading to profound changes in how information is created, accessed, organized, and disseminated. These changes have reshaped the functions and expectations of libraries across the world. As pivotal institutions in the knowledge economy, libraries are now more than repositories

of printed materials they have evolved into dynamic learning environments and digital information hubs that serve diverse user communities. Consequently, the traditional role of library and information service (LIS) providers has expanded to include more complex, technology-driven responsibilities that require continuous learning and skill enhancement.

In Nigeria, as in many developing countries, the LIS profession is undergoing a critical transformation in response to these global developments. The modern Nigerian library is under increasing pressure to deliver innovative, timely, and relevant services that meet the expectations of users who are increasingly familiar with and dependent on digital technologies. Users now demand not only access to physical resources but also seamless access to digital collections, online databases, and personalized services. To meet these expectations, LIS providers must possess a broad range of competencies that go beyond traditional librarianship. These include technical ICT skills, digital content management, advocacy, communication, user education, and the ability to engage meaningfully with diverse user communities.

Several scholars have emphasized the necessity for LIS professionals to acquire and maintain up-to-date competencies in response to the changing library landscape (Rumyantseva et al., 2019; Dube, 2021; Mohammed et al., 2022). The modern LIS professional is no longer just a custodian of books but must function as an information specialist, digital curator, instructional partner, and advocate for equitable information access. This shift calls for a redefinition of professional competencies, particularly in the context of developing countries like Nigeria, where systemic challenges such as underfunding, limited access to technology, and inadequate professional development opportunities persist.

A major concern in the Nigerian LIS sector is the persistent gap between the competencies required to operate in a 21st-century information environment and the actual skill sets possessed by many LIS providers. Research suggests that while some Nigerian LIS professionals demonstrate proficiency in ICT and user services, significant gaps remain in specialized areas such as repository management, metadata creation, network security, programming, and emerging digital tools (Lazarus et al., 2019; Okeji et al., 2020; Ilesanmi, 2023). For example, many librarians are familiar with basic ICT tools but lack advanced skills in areas such as text and data mining, linked data, digital preservation, and cloud computing (Adam, 2021; Okoroma, 2023). These limitations hinder their ability to deliver efficient digital services, engage in scholarly communication, and support institutional research and learning goals. Research by Ilesanmi (2023) also highlighted that librarians in private universities in Southern Nigeria possess basic ICT skills but lack programming skills, indicating a need for continuous capacity development in ICT. Similarly, David and Soyemi (2021) emphasized the need for librarians to possess a solid understanding of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to effectively manage digital resources and provide innovative services to users.

Application of ICT in Nigerian libraries is often constrained by poor infrastructure, inconsistent internet connectivity, and limited institutional support. Nonetheless, ICT remains an essential competency area, as it underpins almost every aspect of modern

librarianship, including cataloguing, classification, digital resource management, virtual reference services, and user engagement. Studies have shown that continuous professional development in ICT not only enhances job performance but also improves service quality, increases job satisfaction, and ensures the long-term relevance of libraries (Abdullahi et al., 2024; Tolman, 2022; Ugwuogu, 2023).

Another critical but often overlooked competency area is advocacy. Advocacy skills enable LIS professionals to effectively promote library services, engage stakeholders, and secure institutional and public support. In the Nigerian context, where libraries often face funding challenges, limited visibility, and undervaluation by policymakers, advocacy becomes vital for survival and growth. Advocacy also plays a key role in raising awareness about information literacy, equitable access to knowledge, and the transformative role of libraries in national development (Edewor, 2020; Nkamnebe & Ogwo, 2021; Adam & Kaur, 2021). Studies have shown that Nigerian librarians exhibit low to moderate advocacy skills, with only a fraction demonstrating strong competence in articulating the library's value proposition to decision-makers and the wider public (Obi, 2023; Igbinovia et al., 2020).

Recent findings suggest that librarians in Nigerian universities and public libraries require targeted training in strategic communication, stakeholder engagement, policy advocacy, and community outreach (Osadcbe et al., 2018; Horsfall, 2020). For instance, campaigns during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for librarians to engage in community sensitization, public health information dissemination, and digital literacy instruction roles that demand

strong advocacy and communication capabilities (Anyim, 2021). Additionally, teacher-librarians in primary and secondary schools also require advocacy skills to promote reading culture, support curriculum delivery, and integrate information literacy into classroom instruction.

Given these realities, it is evident that the LIS profession in Nigeria must adopt a competency-based approach to training, recruitment, and professional development. According to Sulyman et al. (2022), investment in librarian employability through ongoing training, internships, and the internationalization of LIS education can help bridge the competence gap. Adeyoyin and Olatokun (2018) similarly recommend specialization in research support services, digital content curation, and instructional design as strategies for enhancing professional effectiveness. These approaches align with global trends emphasizing interdisciplinary learning, hybrid skill sets, and the integration of soft and technical skills.

Despite isolated initiatives by individual institutions and professional associations, the overall competency landscape among Nigerian LIS providers remains fragmented and underdeveloped. There is a lack of nationally coordinated capacity-building programs, competency frameworks, and accreditation standards that reflect the needs of the digital age. Many LIS professionals rely on informal learning, self-instruction, or sporadic workshops that do not offer the depth and consistency required to foster genuine expertise.

This situation underscores the urgent need to assess and understand the specific competence needs of LIS professionals in Nigeria. Such an assessment is essential for developing targeted interventions that can equip li-

brarians with the necessary skills to navigate a complex and rapidly changing information environment. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the competence needs of library and information service providers in Nigeria across three critical domains: knowledge of librarianship, ICT proficiency, and advocacy skills. By identifying key gaps and highlighting areas for professional development, the study aims to contribute to evidence-based policy and practice that can support the transformation of library services in Nigeria.

In summary, the future of library and information services in Nigeria depends on the capacity of LIS professionals to adapt, innovate, and lead in the face of technological, institutional, and social change. A well-rounded competency profile that integrates core librarianship, digital expertise, and advocacy is vital for ensuring that libraries remain relevant, effective, and impactful in meeting the information needs of the Nigerian population. This research endeavours to provide empirical insights that can inform strategic planning, professional development, and curriculum design aimed at enhancing the competencies of LIS providers and advancing the profession in Nigeria.

Research questions
The following research questions were examined in this study:

The following research questions were examined in this study:
1. What are the perceived competencies needed in knowledge of librarianship among library and information providers in Nigeria?
2. What are the perceived competencies needed in application of ICT skills to librarianship among library and infor-

mation providers in Nigeria?
3. What are the perceived competencies needed in advocacy skills among library and information providers in Nigeria?

METHODOLOGY
This study adopted descriptive survey research design. The 58 registered participants present at the 2019 Conference of the Information Technology Section of NLA at Federal University Lokoja in Kogi State of Nigeria made the population of the study. The population comprised the organizers of the conference (the executives of the IT Section), librarians both professional and para-professional, lecturers and ICT personnel from different libraries in the country. A structured questionnaire designed by the researchers and validated by three professional librarians from Olabisi Onabanjo University was distributed before the commencement of the day 3 of the conference to the thirty-eight (38) participants who were willing to take part in the survey. The questionnaire comprises two sections. Section A elicits data on demographic information of the respondents in terms of type of library, qualification, work experience, age, gender, etc. Section B is a 33-item questionnaire on a five likert scale of very low extent; low extent; moderate extent; high extent and very high extent with weighted value of 1 - 5 to collect data on competence needed for library practice. All the 38 copies of questionnaire distributed were retrieved and found useful for the analysis of the study. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 was used to analyze the data based on formulated objectives of the study. The data was presented using the frequency counts, simple percentages, mean and standard deviations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A significant portion of the respondents, 26 out of 38 (68.4%), work in academic libraries, indicating that the majority of the sample is drawn from higher education institutions (Table 1). This is further supported by the fact that 52.6% of these institutions are federal-owned, highlighting a strong federal presence in the academic library sector. In terms of educational qualifications, the majority of respondents hold a Master's degree (42.1%), followed by Bachelor's degree holders (28.9%), suggesting a well-educated workforce within the libraries. Gender distribution among the respondents shows a male dominance, with 60.5% being male, while 39.5% are female. The age range of respondents is quite varied, but the largest group falls within the 36-40 years range (23.7%), indicating that many of the participants are in their mid-career stages. In terms of work experience, a significant number of respondents have between 6-10 years of experience (34.2%). The job status of the respondents reveals that a majority, 63%, are professional librarians, while others hold positions such as library officers, lecturers, ICT personnel, and administrators (Table 1).

The most critical competencies included handling library management application software ($x̄$ =4.42), library management/administration ($x̄$ =4.34), and knowledge of electronic resources management and ICT applications in library practices ($x̄$ =4.26) – Table 2. These findings suggest that technological proficiency and management skills are paramount for librarians. Conversely, competencies like understanding library law and legislation/copyright issues ($x̄$ =3.63) and library marketing ($x̄$ =3.79) are deemed less critical, though still important. This indicates a strong emphasis on technological and management skills over legal and promotional aspects in the current librarianship landscape.

The study's findings revealed that library and information services providers in Nigeria possess significant knowledge of various competencies needed for effective library and information services provision (Table 2). This indicates that library and information service providers recognize the importance of acquiring specific skills and knowledge to meet the evolving information needs of users. The most critical competencies identified include handling library management application software, library management/administration, and knowledge of electronic resources management and ICT applications in library practices. This suggests that technological proficiency and management skills are paramount for librarians in Nigeria. This finding is supported by Lazarus et al. (2019) who pointed out that professional competencies for librarians in Nigeria include educational qualifications, understanding indigenous knowledge sources, and possessing basic ICT skills. This reinforces the study's findings that emphasize the necessity of continuous training and development to enhance librarians' competencies in various areas, including digital literacy and resource management. The study by Ilesanmi (2023) highlights that librarians in private universities in Southern Nigeria possess basic ICT skills but lack programming skills, indicating a need for ongoing capacity development in ICT. This is consistent with the study's findings that reveal gaps in specific competencies, particularly in digital literacy, which is crucial for effective librarianship in the current information landscape.

Table 1: Respondents' Demographic Information

Characteristic	Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Library Type	National	2	5.3
	Academic	26	68.4
	School	2	5.3
	Special	8	21.0
	Total	**38**	**100.0**
Gender	Male	23	60.5
	Female	15	39.5
	Total	**38**	**100.0**
Age Range	21 – 25	3	7.9
	26 – 30	1	2.6
	31 – 35	7	18.4
	36 – 40	9	23.7
	41 – 45	6	15.8
	46 – 50	7	18.4
	50 +	5	13.2
	Total	**38**	**100.0**
Job Status	Library	5	13.2
	Officers	24	63.0
	Librarians	5	13.2
	Lecturers	2	5.3
	ICT Personnel Administrators	2	5.3
	Total	**38**	**100.0**
Qualification	Diploma	5	13.2
	Bachelor	11	28.9
	Masters	16	42.5
	Ph.D.	6	15.8
	Total	**38**	**100.0**
Ownership	Federal	20	52.6
	State	16	42.1
	Private	2	5.3
	Total	38	100.0
Work Experience	1 - 5	6	15.8
	6 - 10	13	34.2
	11 - 15	7	18.3
	16 - 20	5	13.2
	21 - 25	3	7.9
	26 - 30	2	5.3
	30+	2	5.3
	Total	**38**	**100.0**

Table 2: Competence needs based on knowledge of librarianship among library and information services providers in Nigeria

S/N	Items	VLE	LE	ME	HE	VHE	$\bar{x}$	SD
1.	Library management application software handling	1(2.6)	0 (0)	3(7.9)	12(31.6)	22(57.9)	4.42	0.86
2.	Library management / administration	1(2.6)	0 (0)	5(13.2)	11(28.9)	21(55.3)	4.34	0.91
3.	Electronic resources knowledge and management	1(2.6)	0 (0)	7(18.4)	10(26.3)	20(52.6)	4.26	0.95
4.	Usage and application of ICT to library practices, routines and services	1(2.6)	1(2.6)	6(15.8)	9(23.7)	21(55.3)	4.26	1.05
5.	Information retrieval skills	1(2.6)	0 (0)	8(21.1)	10(26.3)	19(50.0)	4.21	0.96
6.	Collection / resources development skills	0 (0)	2(5.3)	5(13.2)	15(39.5)	16(42.1)	4.18	0.87
7.	Resources preservation	1(2.6)	0 (0)	5(13.2)	18(47.4)	14(36.8)	4.16	0.86
8.	Understanding of users and users' needs	1(2.6)	3(7.9)	5(13.2)	11(28.9)	18(47.4)	4.11	1.09
9.	Cataloguing and classification	0 (0)	3(7.9)	8(21.1)	12(31.6)	15(39.5)	4.03	0.97
10.	Database (print and non-print) management	1(2.6)	1(2.6)	9(23.7)	13(34.2)	14(36.8)	4.00	0.99
11.	User education programme and training	2(5.3)	2(5.3)	8(21.1)	11(28.9)	15(39.5)	3.92	1.15
12.	Archives and manuscript maintenance	3(7.9)	1(2.6)	9(23.7)	13(34.2)	12(31.6)	3.79	1.17
13.	Library marketing philosophy and practices	1(2.6)	4(10.5)	9(23.7)	12(31.6)	12(31.6)	3.79	1.09
14.	Library law and legislation / copyright issues	2(5.3)	6(15.8)	8(21.1)	10(26.3)	12(31.6)	3.63	1.24
Competence needs for knowledge of librarianship							**4.08**	**0.80**

VLE: very low extent; LE: low extent; ME: moderate extent;
HE: high extent, VHE: very high extent

The highest-rated competencies include information literacy skills (x = 4.08), digital library organization management and preservation, and library automation skills, both with a mean of 4.03 (Table 3). These results suggest that the ability to manage digital resources and utilize automation technologies is crucial for modern librarianship. On the other hand, competencies like computing and programming skills (x = 3.63) and networking and consortia arrangement skills (x = 3.67) are rated lower (Table 3), indicating that while these skills are important, they may not be as critical as those directly related to managing digital resources and information literacy. These suggest that the evolving landscape of librarianship places a high value on skills that support digital resource management and effective use of automated systems.

The findings of the study also revealed a significant demand for various ICT-related competencies, with an overall mean score of 3.90 (Table 3). This suggests that librarians recognize the importance of effectively utilizing information and communication technologies to manage digital resources and enhance service delivery. The highest-rated competencies include information literacy skills and digital library organization, management, and preservation, underscoring the necessity for librarians to be proficient in managing digital information effectively. These findings align with the work of David and Soyemi (2021), who emphasized the need for librarians to possess a solid understanding of ICTs to manage digital resources effectively and provide innovative services to users. Additionally, Adeyoyin and Olatokun (2018) highlighted the importance of specialized knowledge in areas such as information literacy instruction and digital preservation, further supporting the need for continuous professional development in ICT skills among library and information service providers in Nigeria. Together, these insights reflect a growing recognition of the critical role that ICT competencies play in modern librarianship, particularly in the context of an increasingly digital information landscape.

The most critical advocacy competencies included the ability to articulate library needs to stakeholders (x = 4.29) and the skills to network and build relationship (x =4.11) – Table 4. Followed by lobbying skills for policy and legislative support (x =4.05) and the skills to engage in public relations and marketing to promote library services x = 4.03). These results highlight the importance of librarians being able to effectively communicate the value and needs of their libraries to external audiences, which is crucial for securing funding, support, and visibility. Other competencies, such as ability to campaign for Resource Mobilization (x = 3.92) and participation in professional library associations (x = 3.92), are rated slightly lower but still reflect important aspects of advocacy (Table 4). The lower mean scores for these competencies suggest that while they are important, they may be less prioritized or more challenging for librarians to engage in compared to direct communication and marketing activities. This indicates a growing recognition of the need for librarians to be proactive in advocating for their institutions, but also points to potential areas for development, particularly in building lobbying skills and increasing active participation in professional associations.

Table 3: Competence needs based on application of ICT skills among library and information services providers in Nigeria

S/N	Items	VLE	LE	ME	HE	VHE	$\bar{x}$	SD
1.	Information literacy skills	-	4(10.5)	5(13.2)	13(34.2)	16(42.1)	4.08	1.00
2.	Digital library organisation, management and preservation	1(2.6)	2(5.3)	10(26.3)	7(18.4)	18(47.4)	4.03	1.10
3.	Library automation use and skills	0 (0)	3(7.9)	9(23.7)	10(26.3)	16(42,1)	4.03	1.00
4.	Library computer / computing application skills	0 (0)	4(10.5)	7(18.4)	12(31.6)	15(39.5)	4.00	1.01
5.	Open access / electronic publishing	0 (0)	6(15.8)	7(18.4)	6(15.8)	19(50.0)	4.00	1.16
6.	Library databases management skills	0 (0)	4(10.5)	8(21.1)	10(26.3)	16(42.1)	4.00	1.04
7.	Electronic resources acquisition, organisation and maintenance	1(2.6)	4(10.5)	5(13.2)	13(34.2)	15(39.5)	3.97	1.10
8.	Media literacy skills	0 (0)	5(13.2)	8(21.1)	10(26.3	15(39.5	3.92	1.08
9.	Data management skills	1(2.6)	4(10.5)	10(26.3)	8(21.1)	15(39.5	3.84	1.15
10.	Social media skills	2(5.3)	4(10.5)	6(15.8)	13(34.2)	13(34.2)	3.82	1.18
11.	Web design, development and maintenance skills	3(7.9)	6(15.8)	7(18.4)	6(15.4)	16(42.1)	3.68	1.38
12.	Networking and consortia arrangement and management skills	2(5.3)	7(18.4)	6(15.8)	9(23.7)	14(36.8)	3.67	1.30
13.	Computing and programming skills	3(7.9)	5(13.2)	7(18.4)	11(28.9)	12(31.6)	3.63	1.28
	Competence needs for ICT skills applied to librarianship						3.90	0.91

VLE: very low extent; LE: low extent; ME: moderate extent; HE: high extent, VHE: very high extent

The findings regarding competence needs based on advocacy skills among library and information providers in Nigeria indicate a high demand for these skills, with an overall mean score of 4.08. This underscores the critical importance of advocacy in effectively promoting library services and articulating the value of libraries to stakeholders. The most essential advocacy competencies identified include the ability to articulate library needs to stakeholders and networking skills for relationship building. These results highlight the necessity for librarians to be proactive in communicating the needs and benefits of their libraries, which is crucial for securing funding and support in a competitive environment. Supporting this, Edewor (2020) emphasizes the significance of capacity-building initiatives that focus on developing communication and stakeholder engagement competencies among librarians. Additionally, Nkamnebe and Ogwo (2021) stress the importance of ongoing professional development to equip librarians with the latest strategies and tools for effective advocacy in a rapidly changing information landscape. Together, these insights affirm the pressing need for enhanced advocacy skills among library and information providers in Nigeria to foster user engagement and support for library services (Table 4).

Table 4: Competence needs based on advocacy skills among library and information providers in Nigeria

S/N	Items	VLE	LE	ME	HE	VHE	$\bar{x}$	SD
1.	Ability to articulate library needs to stakeholders	0 (0)	3(7.9)	4(10.5)	10(26.3)	21(55.3)	4.29	0.96
2.	Lobbying skills for policy and legislative support	1(2.6)	2(5.3)	4(10.5)	18(47.4)	13(34.2)	4.05	0.96
3.	Marketing and promotion skills	0 (0)	4(10.5)	6(15.8)	13(34.2)	15(39.5)	4.03	1.00
4.	Participation in professional library associations	0 (0)	3(7.9)	8(21.1)	16(42.1)	11(28.9)	3.92	0.91
5.	Networking and Relationship Building Skills	0 (0)	2(5.3)	4(10.5)	20(52.6)	12(31.6)	4.11	0.80
6.	Ability to campaign for Resource Mobilization.	0 (0)	3(7.9)	8(21.1)	16(42.1)	11(28.9)	3.92	0.91
Competence needs for advocacy skills							4.08	0.79

VLE: very low extent, LE: low extent; ME: moderate extent; HE: high extent, VHE: very high extent

CONCLUSION

Findings revealed that while LIS providers show a fair level of competence in traditional librarianship functions, there are notable gaps in advanced ICT applications such as programming, repository management, and digital literacy.

Advocacy skills especially in articulating library needs to stakeholders, lobbying, and relationship-building are insufficiently developed, limiting the ability of librarians to promote services and secure institutional support.

There is an urgent need for targeted and continuous professional development initiatives to build and sustain the competencies of LIS providers in Nigeria.

Institutions must invest in strategic training programs that equip librarians not only with technical skills but also with soft skills necessary for communication, collaboration, and advocacy in a competitive digital landscape.

Strengthening these competencies will empower LIS professionals to enhance service delivery, remain relevant, and play a pivotal role in bridging information gaps in their communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:
The library management should implement continuous training programs to enhance the competencies of library and information service providers in Nigeria, focusing on specialized training in areas such as digital literacy, programming, and repository management to ensure that librarians can effectively navigate the digital landscape.

There should be capacity-building development initiatives that focus on enhancing librarians' advocacy skills, including communication, stakeholder engagement, and lobbying techniques.

Information professionals should engage in continuous collaboration with professional library associations to facilitate networking, sharing of best practices, and collaborative advocacy efforts among librarians.

The library management should conduct regular assessments to identify specific competency gaps among library and information service providers, allowing for continuous but targeted training and development initiatives.

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